

Project Green Thumb

HAL JENKINS



WILLIE JOHN TAYLOR at long last felt that he was doing something of value for the Arkansas county where he was born and had lived for some 65 years.

As a worker-trainee in Project Green Thumb, created to combat rural poverty and rural ugliness, he is one of a corps of rural senior citizens recruited in a pilot program launched in 1966.

Taylor spoke for the 426 other Green Thumb workers when he said: "Planting to beautify our roads makes me feel that I am doing something worth while. What we do will be seen and appreciated for many years by the people who drive along our highways."

Doris Gray, Green Thumb office secretary at Trenton, N.J., developed a warm feeling for the project when the first job applicants reported. "This group of elder citizens had read about the project in the newspapers, and they crowded into the office," she said. "We didn't have enough chairs so they just stood around, waiting patiently to be interviewed."

"What impressed me most was their eagerness to be useful, to do something worth while—and actually to be needed. These men have been active and independent all their lives, and it must mean an awful lot to them to think they can still work and earn a little money."

The low-income farmers and farmer-retirees felt the same way in Minnesota. More than 218 of them applied for jobs even though only 77 could be hired.

In Oregon, two applicants—one 69 and the other 76—proved that having a green thumb wasn't necessary. In fact,

it wasn't necessary to have a thumb at all. Both had lost a thumb in accidents, but they still passed their physicals and joined the crews of roadside beautifiers.

"Perhaps our major problem," said Jim Johnson, State director of the project in Arkansas, "is keeping them slowed down enough so it will not injure their health. We insist our foremen give them more than adequate rest breaks."

"Operation Green Thumb" was conceived by Dr. Blue Carstenson, formerly the executive director of the National Council of Senior Citizens. Dr. Robert McCan, then director of Older Persons Programs for the Office of Economic Opportunity and a former teacher in Boston University's School of Education, helped develop the idea.

Drs. Carstenson and McCan are now the national director and the associate director, respectively, of Green Thumb, Inc., a subsidiary of the National Farmers Union. And Henry E. Wilcox is the national State director.

The program is guided by a National Advisory Committee of 11 headed by U.S. Senators Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin and Harrison A. Williams, Jr., of New Jersey. Ex officio members include five representatives of the Department of Agriculture.

The project was approved late in 1965, and Federal funds were provided in February of 1966. The U.S. Office of



Hal Jenkins is *Chief* of the Information Services Branch, Information Division of the Soil Conservation Service.



Campfire festivities along the Crow Wing Trail, Huntersville, Minn. Green Thumb work crews helped to clear and beautify this trail.

Economic Opportunity allocated \$768,000 to carry out pilot demonstration projects in some selected counties of New Jersey, Arkansas, Minnesota, and Oregon. Indiana was added as the fifth State. The Federal allocation is nearly matched by \$680,000 in contributions from the State highway departments and other governmental agencies, the Farmers Union, and other groups cooperating in the program.

In Minnesota, for example, about 43 agencies, organizations, and officials are cooperating.

Dr. Carstenson says Green Thumb's basic objectives are:

1. To provide employment to men in poverty. (The average family income per year of Green Thumb workers is \$980.)

2. To provide employment for older men, on a part-time basis, and demonstrate that these men can work, want to work, need to work, and ought to have the opportunity to work.

3. To beautify the roadways and parks,

as part of the national emphasis inspired in large part by Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson.

4. To help public agencies, such as highway departments, to see the wisdom of changing employment policies so that older men can work on a part-time or a seasonal basis.

In its first year, Green Thumb operated in 22 counties having concentrations of older farmers in the below \$1,700 individual income bracket, which is the limit for qualification.

Most participants are 65 or older, although some younger than 65 are still accepted. Each applicant must pass a physical examination. The men work 3 to 4 days a week and can earn up to a maximum of \$1,500 a year. They receive several days training before going out on the job—in proper planting methods, operating equipment, pruning, safety practices, and the like. Worker-trainees receive \$1.25 to \$1.50 an hour. A foreman receives \$1.50 to \$1.75 per

hour and operates a car pool to transport his crew to and from work.

In Arkansas, the first State to get into operation, Green Thumbers planted trees every 20 feet along the right-of-way of a 40-mile stretch of road. In all, they planted 150,000 trees.

In Minnesota, Green Thumb crews planted 105,000 trees, cut several miles of brush that obscured views of two lakes, and cleared and cleaned up along the 40-mile Crow Wing Saddle and Canoe Trail.

In New Jersey, the crews concentrated upon planting and caring for shrubbery in medial strips of highways to reduce headlight glare for safer night driving.

Those are just a few of the tangible accomplishments reported in the third quarter of the first year.

What about the future of Project Green Thumb?

"Naturally, we hope to continue and

to expand the work," Carstenson said.

"More than 1 million older and retired farmers over 65 badly need additional income. We have proved they can and want to work; that they can carry out projects of value to the public."

Director Carstenson said an important byproduct of the project is developing new skills among the oldsters so that, once the age-prejudice barrier is overcome, they can obtain useful part-time employment as gardeners, nurserymen, landscapers, and similar work. Another is rural opportunity loans to help them set up nurseries to grow plants for future beautification work.

It can safely be said of Project Green Thumb that it is helping to alleviate poverty among our rural senior citizens, stimulating the self-pride and economy of small towns, beautifying the highways, retraining oldsters to a useful trade, and providing motorists with travel pleasure.

Healing Strip Mining Scars

MAURICE K. GODDARD



ALTHOUGH the extraction of minerals is important to our material well-being, it is the duty of government, industry, and the people to protect the land from surface mining damage in order to maintain a livable and pleasant environment.

This case study illustrates how planning procedures, developed and carried forward to fruition by government, industry, and local communities, can erase the scars of strip mining operations and restore a pleasing appearance to a thoroughly blighted area.

In the beginning, the anthracite region of northeastern Pennsylvania was a rich, mountainous land. It was spectacularly

beautiful with deep forests and countless clear, sparkling streams.

Deep underground mining was conducted in this region for over 100 years. Great masses of debris, consisting of the material removed in driving passages to reach coal seams and refuse from the breakers, accumulated around the collieries. This material encroached upon the surrounding communities.

After the transition to the open pit mining of coal deposits which began in the early 1930's, the appearance of the



Maurice K. Goddard is *Secretary of Forests and Waters*, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.